Remember! Celebrate! Act! A Day On…Not A Day Off

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

January 20, 2014

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

The quality, not the longevity, of one's life is what is important.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Martin Luther King Jr. was a fundamental force behind the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

Still, establishing his January 15th birthday as a national holiday required great persistence.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Coretta Scott King led the long-fought campaign to recognize her late husband's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated April 4, 1968, while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine motel in Memphis, Tennessee.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Channeling her grief, Coretta Scott King concentrated her energies on continuing her husband's work. Years of planning, fundraising, and lobbying lay ahead, but she would not be deterred, nor did she neglect continuing to fight for the causes her husband had championed.

This presentation chronicles the uphill struggle to establish the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

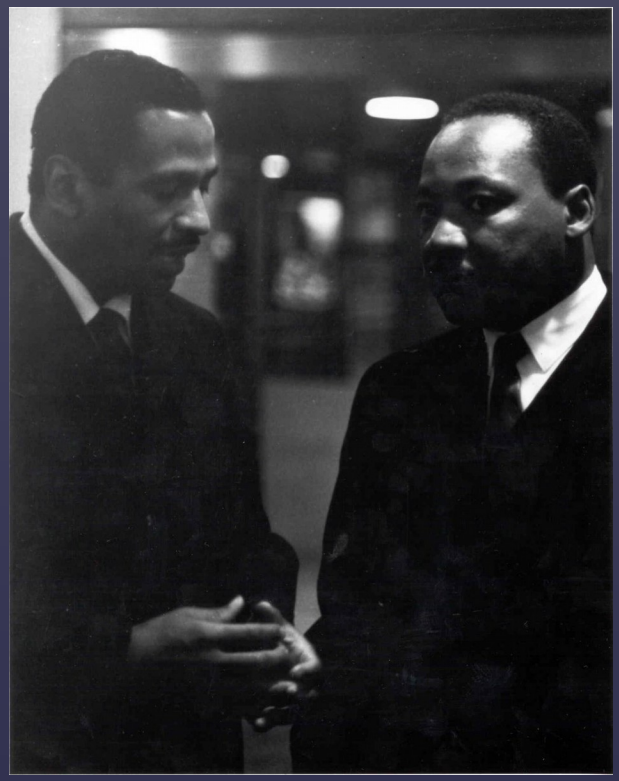
Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

April 1968

Coretta Scott King led a silent march of 50,000 people through the streets of Memphis. The next day, she made a televised speech at her husband's funeral.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

On the same day, Congressman John Conyers introduced the first legislation for establishing Martin Luther King's birthday as a federal holiday.



Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

June 26, 1968

Coretta Scott King established the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in the basement of the couple's home.

Her mission was to create a living memorial to preserve her husband’s papers and promote his teachings.

Additionally, she began planning for the first annual observance of Dr. King’s birthday.

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Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1969

On January 15th, the King Center sponsored the first annual observance of Dr. King's birthday with an ecumenical service and other events, and publically called for a nationwide commemoration of his birthday.

This initial observance became the model for subsequent celebrations of Dr. King's life.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

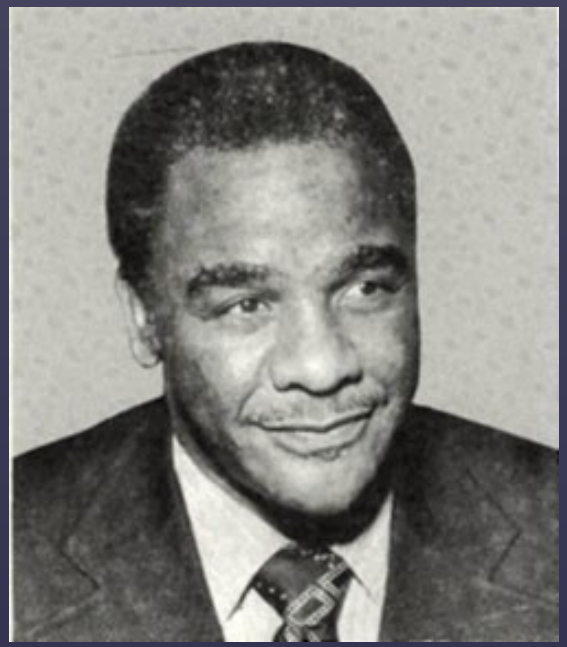
1971

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference gathered three million petition signatures supporting the official establishment of the King holiday, and presented them to Congress.

Congress took no action.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1973



Illinois Assemblyman Harold Washington sponsored the first state bill for the King holiday. Illinois was the first state to establish Dr. King’s birthday as an official holiday.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1974

Massachusetts and Connecticut enact statewide King holidays.

1975

The New Jersey State Supreme Court ruled that the state must provide a paid holiday in honor of Dr. King, in accordance with the state government's labor contract.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1978

The National Council of Churches called on Congress to recognize the King holiday.

1979

Coretta Scott King testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee. She urged Representative Conyers to bring the bill up for a House floor vote.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1979

The King Center launched a nationwide King holiday petition campaign, which was signed by more than 300,000 people before the end of the year.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1979

President Jimmy Carter called on Congress to pass the national King holiday. The bill finally began to move through Congressional committees.

The Conyers King Holiday bill was defeated by five votes in the House.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1980

Stevie Wonder released the song “Happy Birthday,” celebrating Dr. King’s life, and urging a holiday in his honor. The song became a rallying cry for establishing the holiday.

Coretta Scott King testified in the House and Senate in support of a National Historic Site in honor of Dr. King.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1981

Coretta Scott King wrote to governors, mayors, and city council members across the United States, encouraging them to pass resolutions and proclamations to recognize celebrations and programs commemorating King’s birthday.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1982

Coretta Scott King testified before the Subcommittee on Census and Population of the House of Representatives, again advocating the creation of the holiday.

She and Stevie Wonder presented petitions with over six million signatures to the House.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1982

The King Center co-sponsored the 19th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington. More than 100 organizations participated.

1983

Coretta Scott King testified yet again before Congress. The bill was finally passed by the House, by a vote of 338 to 90.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1983

The King Center convened the 20th Anniversary March on Washington that led more than 500,000 marchers to the Lincoln Memorial.

There, the speakers called on the Senate and President Ronald Reagan to pass the King holiday.

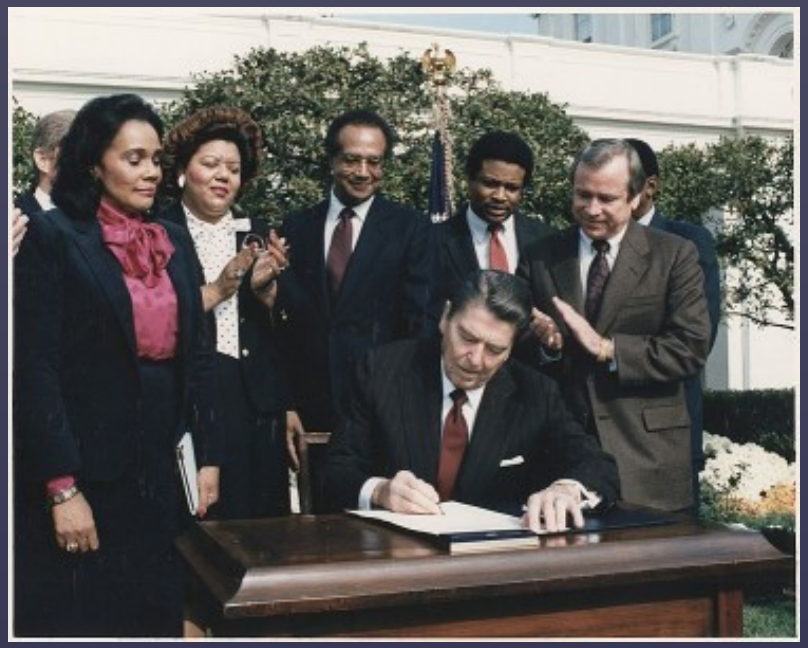
Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1983

The Holiday Bill, sponsored by Senator Ted Kennedy, passed the U.S. Senate by a vote of 78-22.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1983



On November 2nd, President Reagan signed the bill. It established the Martin Luther King Jr. National Holiday, to be celebrated the 3rd Monday of every January.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1984

The King Center developed a legislative proposal to establish the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission to oversee observance of the holiday. Congress passed the legislation by a voice vote.

President Reagan signed legislation providing for the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1984

In the first meeting of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission, Coretta Scott King is unanimously elected Chairperson.

1986

On January 20th, the first national King Holiday is observed. Seventeen states were already observing the King holiday.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1989

The establishment of the King Holiday Commission encouraged additional states to officially observe Dr. King’s birthday.

Subsequently, the number of states that observed the holiday grew to 44.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1990

The United Auto Workers successfully negotiated with the big three auto companies making Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday a paid holiday.

The Wall St. Journal reported that only 18 percent of 317 private corporations provided a paid King Holiday.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1992

After a coalition of Arizona citizens launched a successful protest and boycott campaign, Arizona passed a referendum establishing a Martin Luther King Jr. state holiday.

1993

Arizona observed their first statewide King holiday, leaving only New Hampshire without one.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1994

Citing Dr. King's statement that *"Everybody can be great because everybody can serve,"* Coretta Scott King beseeched Congress to make the King holiday an official national day of humanitarian service.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1994

President Bill Clinton signed the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday and Service Act, expanding the mission of the holiday as a day of community service, interracial cooperation, and youth anti-violence initiatives.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1996

The Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission concluded its mission, and transferred responsibility for coordinating nationwide holiday programs and activities to the King Center.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1998

A survey of 458 employers found that 26 percent provided a paid King holiday.

The survey also found that 33 percent of union contract firms provided a paid King holiday, compared to 22 percent of nonunion companies.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

1999

Governor Jean Shaheen of New Hampshire signed the King Holiday legislation into law, becoming the 50th state to enact the holiday.

The U.S. Senate unanimously passed legislation requiring all federal institutions to fly the U.S. flag on the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

2000

The King Center's National Holiday Advisory Committee replaced the Federal King Holiday Commission. Its mission was to promote the holiday among all 50 states.

Every U.S. governor was asked to appoint two state representatives to coordinate their state celebrations.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, *“Life's most persistent and urgent question is: “What are you doing for others?”*

Each year, Americans across the country answer that question by coming together on the King Holiday to serve their neighbors and communities. The day represents the opportunity to start the year off right by making a positive impact in the community.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

During his lifetime, Dr. King encouraged all citizens to pursue the purpose and potential of America. He strived to realize the dream of equality, and a nation that affords freedom and justice f

Coretta Scott King shared his dream.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

"As a nation chooses its heroes and heroines, a nation interprets its history and shapes its destiny. The commemoration of the life and work of Martin Luther King Jr. can help America realize its true destiny as the global model for democracy, economic and social justice, and as the first nonviolent society in human history."

— Coretta Scott King

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Dawn W. Smith, Senior Writer
DEOMI Research Directorate

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